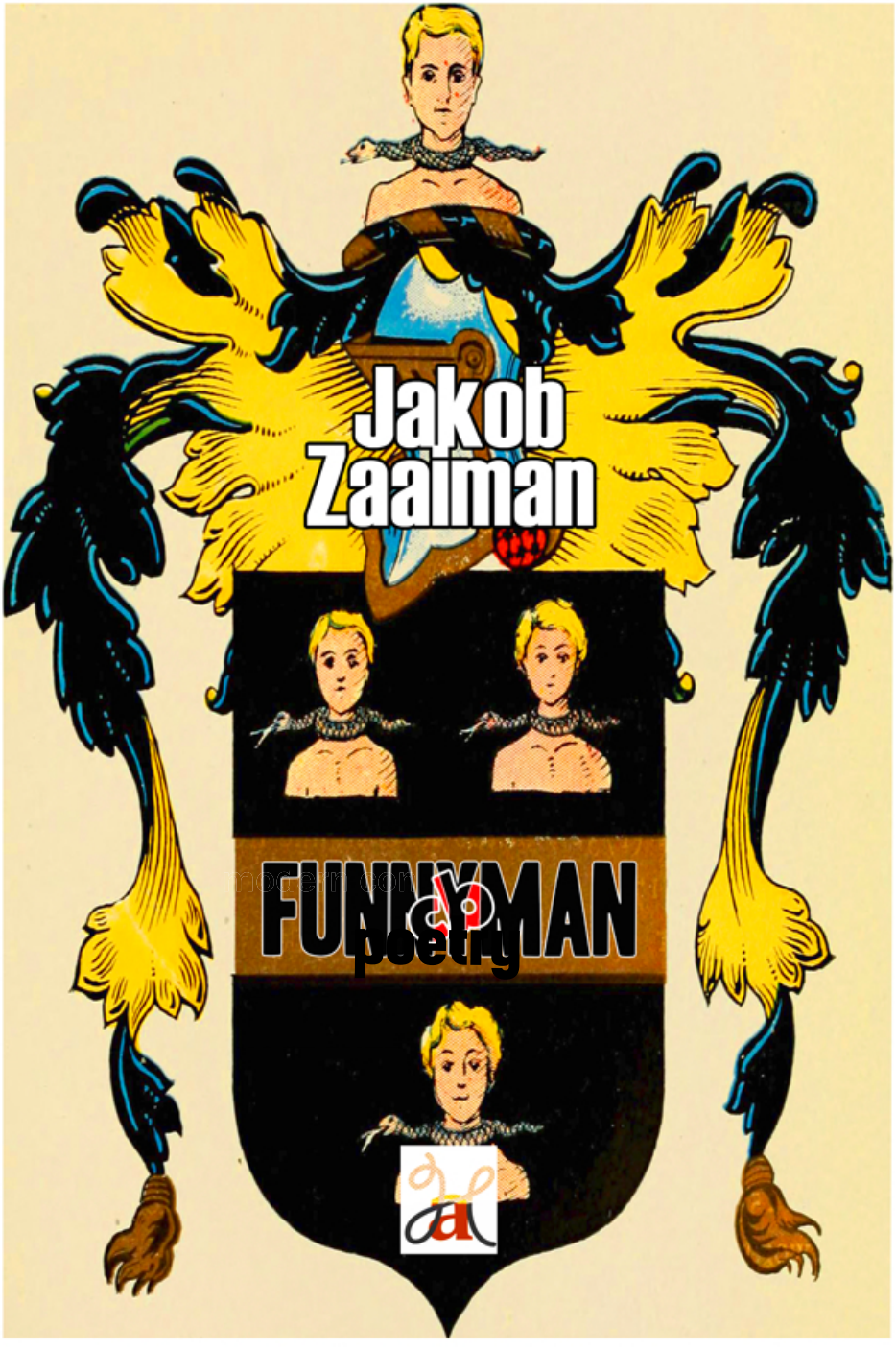
Jakob
Zaaiman
FUNNYMAN
poetry

FUNNYMAN

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POEMS

JAKOB ZAAIMAN

LONDON
2024

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ISBN: 9798359265553

Published 2024
HarfieldAcademic
London, UK

Cover art by Jakob Zaaiman

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Black in Whiteface Black

We had a family doctor
– called Merrick – who came round
whenever one of us was sick,
and somehow always
made us well again.
That's medicine at its best.
He was ageless, and James Bond handsome
in his expensive suits, always carrying
a shiny black leather medical bag,
and always smelling strongly of some kind of
medical disinfectant, which made him
seem bracingly accomplished.
And his manner was just right too:
no small talk, just swift diagnoses
and clipped instructions;
and his pronouncements, like
those of our dentist and our vet,
were known to be infallible.
And Merrick always seemed to be
reassuringly 'nearby', and
would call round that very day
whenever we asked
him to.

Maybe the James Bond junk
was a clue. He's sure to be
long dead of old age by now, but I don't
know that for sure. However, what
I do know is that
Dr Merrick liked, on his holidays

(so I heard, I was only a boy)
– to go big game hunting
in Africa (where else) –
with a group of like-minded peers;
big game hunting for
big game like lions and elephant
and big buffalo.
I thought nothing of it
– what was there for me to think ? –
and as Dr Merrick surely knew everything
there was to know about
anything existentially important, so
if hunting was what he wanted to do
on his holidays, then it must have
been exactly right in every respect.

Then word of an accidental holiday shooting !
Oh my god ! Shots from a shotgun !
Merrick bagged in the bush ! Impossible !
Christ almighty, you don't shoot
your fucking GP !

So we understood
he wouldn't be calling round for
a while, even if we really needed him.
He had first to 'heal thyself'. Turns out
Dr Merrick had been plugged, accidentally,
by one of his friends, because
Merrick somehow got himself
into the firing line, in which
one of his medical friends
– brandishing his shotgun – and thinking
– as could easily happen, surely – that the shape

of Merrick up ahead was possibly big game,
and definitely worth taking a pot-shot at,
and so therefore fuck-shot Merrick in the arse,
or in the face, or in the cock,
by some accidental freak intentional accident.
I was told that someone had shouted
'Don't shoot, for medical fucksake !'
followed by (a big) 'DOUBLE BLAM !'
– both barrels – and – oh no ! –
man down, man down, they got (someone) him !
An everyday medical mistake, if you
are a big game hunter on holiday from your
demanding medical practice, and
needing to let off steam, and let off a
few discreet farts in the bush, and trying to
relax, just for one precious tiny
moment in your bastardly stressful big
pharmaceutically-based game life.

Merrick wasn't dead, but he had been badly
fuckshot up with buckshot up.
He wouldn't have died – obviously not –
surrounded as he was by all those highly
skilled and clever physicians;
they could have taken
any number of buckshot fuckshot pellets
out of his arse, or out of his face,
or out of his cock, in seconds, with their
tweezers and medical pliers and shiny
disinfected probes, deployed,
as they surely would be,
with effortless expertise.
So Merrick was in the very best of hands,

if you'll just think about it, and give
it a minute.

But just how easy is it to mistake one
of your hunting party for big game ?
Did poor old Merrick look exactly
like a farm animal
disguised as a James Bond ?
Maybe he was camouflaged, like
one of those a special forces soldiers
you see in Afghanistan, or Libya, with a
bush sticking out of his head,
and one of the other doctors had
opened fire on the camouflaged bush
thinking it was just another stupid bush
in the bush.
Alas, poor Merrick !

And these doctors must definitely
have been hunting at night,
using torches like the police use
in movies, torches which illumine
absolutely nothing at all, torches
which give off just a thin, dim
useless beam of no light whatsoever,
so as not to spoil the stupid jump-scare plot, so
we can't see the stupid fucking monster
elephant or murdering criminal
mastermind buffalo hiding
in the bushes right there, watch out !
right in front of us.
That's what Merrick and his chums

must have been doing: hunting
in the pitch black darkness of night
with only useless 'movie torches'
to hand, so they couldn't
see the poor bugger Merrick camouflaged there
like just another big bush in
the big bad old bush.

Or was there a drunken doctor fight,
at the watering hole, with whisky-fuelled
off-duty drunken doctors on holiday
acting like competitive schoolboys,
harbouring competitive secret grudges
which could best be played out with an
accidental shooting ? Was Merrick
just too James Bond for the other
lesser doctor guys with their tiny penises, or
were the others even more
Hollywood than Merrick, with much
bigger cocks, and squarer jawlines,
and better qualifications, like
incredibly difficult brain surgery,
and impossible head and cock transplants, plus
the sought-after skills to do
sci-fi Total Recall cylinder implants,
and they saw poor Merrick as just
another lowlife loser family GP, and not
really one of their peers at all, and
so they decided – subliminally, unconsciously,
unanimously, and true to medical
textbook Freudianism –
to get rid of him with one of those completely
unforeseen 'hunting accidents'

that seem to keep happening
every now and then ?

Was it God who said ‘there are no
real accidents, only things which
look like accidents, and other things
which look exactly like Ernest Hemingway
on a hunting holiday-away’ ?
We’ll never know, will we, although
we’ve known all along,
haven’t we.

Hat of Fuck

A hollow wooden staircase – more like
an angled ladder – led up to my bedroom,
so that I was always well forewarned,
– by the sound of the clack of
shod or bare feet on the planks –
of anyone coming up to see me.
And the sounds came to speak
to me as a voice, often telling
me exactly who to expect; someone
fast or slow, heavy or light,
old or young, angry or calm.

And as a somewhat retarded
teenager – meaning always
way behind any teenage curve –
I remember morbidly obsessing about
a certain girlfriend. Was she the one
for me ? And how to decide ? And
if you're young, and inexperienced,
you think things over and over again,
trying every thought from
every angle, winding yourself
upstairs to nowhere, as if it
were life and death.

But are those fears justified ?
Of course they are. And the hopes ?
Yes those too. No way forward; no way
back. Only thing is to run all the ideas
through your thoughts again, hoping

this hundredth time, for some kind of
resolution; some kind of
clear path to a clear decision.
It wasn't going to happen,
I knew it.

Then one night a bad dream.
I am lying on my bed, dozing or
asleep or dreaming – yes you can
dream in a dream - and I hear
feet on those steps. Slow and heavy
and measured, meaning old and fat, so
must be my mother; and close
close behind them another set of
clacks, this time my girlfriend;
they are climbing the stairs together,
one plodding slap after the other, a
steady zombie walk, and they are
coming up, not for a friendly chat but
determined to kill me, to do
me away and be done with it, and
it will not be with an axe or a knife
or a hammer; it is going to be
a slow death by belittling words,
spread carefully out
over the years ahead, drip
by steady poisonous drip.
The two of them are
dead sure that, together
as a pair, they can do it.
And suddenly I'm sure
of it too – dead certain of it –
and suddenly sure too

that right there and then
they are never going to be
given half of a half of half
a chance.

Jude the Unshrewd

Her name was Helen –
from Australia –
and it was all a very long time ago:
the late 1960s.
Helen managed a shop
selling eastern ethnic goods
near the British Museum;
one of those shops which really stank
– very attractively, I thought – of incense,
fresh leather, animal skins and immersive
otherworldly exoticism. Why
bother going to Afghanistan, or Tibet,
or Nepal Bhutan Himalayistan
when you could wander around shops
like these, handling the goods, smelling
the patchouli and the distant dung,
and hearing the altogether unfamiliar sounds
of oriental yak yurt music.

Helen took a liking to me. Or, at least,
she said she did. Sales must have been a bit
slow that day. There were lots of people
looking at stuff, but no one seemed to
be buying. Did anyone ever ? Na na na
nana na (Hey Jude). These shops
only lasted a short time
and then disappeared, only
to reappear somewhere nearby with a
slightly different name. It was
hard to know what to make

of what this was all about,
what with these transient shops
and their otherworldly goods,
offering us passing glimpses
of an extra-terrestrial
elsewhere.

Helen said she really
wanted me to meet her guru,
yeah – a Tibetan Lama, who lived
in a mansion somewhere
near Cambridge. She said
she'd call him by phone
and arrange a meeting.
Okay.
But the conversation did not go well.
Helen was excited, and you could hear it
in her voice.
She described me to the Lama
as a 'beautiful young man
who wants to meet you' –which was
kind of nice (!), though
quite a bit sugary as there was
no beauty in me, only adolescent androgyny;
and then, after an awkward silence, and
an obvious confusion, she
repeated 'It's Helen….I'm Helen; Helen'.
There you go.
So the all-seeing,
all-knowing Tibetan meditation master
– easily reachable by phone –
wasn't sure who she was,
and probably didn't get what

she was on about, and heard nothing
at all about the beautiful
young man.

A meeting was
supposedly arranged for
a small group of us selected 'elect' a
week later at the Buddhist Society,
but of course the astral guy
didn't turn up; nor was there
any explanation for his
not being there. Too busy
concentrating on himself
and his special mission, is my guess.
The rest of us were reduced to
chatting amongst ourselves. And
as part compensation Helen thought
she should introduce me to
the other regulars, but she had
forgotten my name, and so
had to ask me, um –
somewhat uncomfortably,
who I was. I enjoyed that;
bang on, a fact cat amongst the
fictional pigeons, it told me all I
needed to know.

I don't want to be
unnecessarily cruel – to either
party in this stupidly theatrical
civilizational 'culture crunch' of nothingness –
but the sheer strength of the
500% overproof pure Tibetan piss

these deeply spiritual Himalayan lamas
were wazzing determinedly down onto
our silly western heads, and straight into
our silly western mouths, and down our
eagerly gulping western throats,
as well as all over our secular westerner
materialist accomplishment bodies,
happily – and 'exactly nicely precisely'
matched the colour of their brightly
concentrated 'overnight piss' yellow
monastic and spiritual
Dalai Lama-wear.

So, as they say, G'day &
Namaste, my dear golden buddy
bath-time wash-down showering
'never really noticed who
you were' friend –
Helen – G'day &
Namaste.

Lucy starrs – thank not your

Kathy the Goth – a graduate from
Berkeley, California, so she said –
except not remotely true as it turned out –
was a big girl, meaning proportionately
big and dumpy and fat all over –
massive wobbly bosoms and a wide arse–
big girl but not obscenely so; she had a nice
friendly face and winning smile; but
she also harboured a strange habit which,
bizarrely, I'm not sure she
even knew about.
Or did she ?

(She was working in my office
at the time but shouldn't/oughtn't to
have been, as she had lied about
her qualifications, which were
non-existent. Worse still, she was
ineducable.)

Now Kathy, after pretty well
every visit she paid to
the bog, even when you
least expected it, say after
hearing her taking a noisy,
drilling, pneumatic and frothy piss,
would leave a little black shit
squirt on the front – repeat yes
on the front – of the inside of
the toilet bowl, in our

communal staff lavatory.

Her black little splat wasn't just a
dismissible little smudge that the
next person could easily flush away,
either with a jet of directed pee, or with
another crash of the cistern, no,
it was more like a thick little smear of
tacky black toothpaste, impossible to
shift without scrubbing it with the
bogbrush, and scrubbing it quite hard.
What was it meant to represent ?
A message ? Like a plea ?
Confusing.

A partial explanation came
to me much later.
Remember, now remember, that
Kathy the Goth was big and fat –
let's keep it real –
so it dawned on me that
with those fat arse cheeks, she
must have found it quite difficult to sit on
the throne the normal way, ie with her
back to the plumbing, because
her huge fat arse would have pushed her
important holes right to the front, risking
her pissing straight onto the seat, and by
implication then onto the carpeted floor, so
instead she was obliged to 'front load' the
beast, sitting astride the porcelain as
if riding a horse, her elbows resting
on the cold cistern lid, as if the lid

were a counter, just like in a maximum-security
prison, where the guard needs to see
your hands at all times.

And with all those Bay Area cappuccinos
and carrot cake slices bubbling inside her,
hubbly-bubbly, it may have been very
difficult not to pass a tacky little blip
every time her anus detected an
open invitation – come on then ! –
from the welcoming bowl below,
if you follow me. But what gets me is,
couldn't she have noticed a little
black oily squiggle against a
pure white background – honestly
as contrasting as a pair of soiled
black boxer shorts lying in
fresh snow – when she stood up ?
Couldn't she have said
to herself, 'Kathy, you big
shit anus Goth, oh yeah, let's
deal with that while I'm at it ?'
Or when she reached for some
paper, couldn't she have thought
'Yeah, oh yeah, I ought to wipe that
Gothic thing away as well, yeah.' Or
didn't she bother even to look down into
the pan, as you do as a matter of
simple self-preservation, to check your
sinking stinking shit for signs of blood, or
for parasites or for morbid discolouration
or for condoms filled with cocaine, or
for fucking fucksake for whatever else ?

As I see it, none of these options
require unusual conceptual
expertise.

I've heard that the young apprentices at
sumo stables in Japan, as part and parcel
of the humiliations inherent in their
apprenticeship, are obliged to wipe
their seniors' rectums after a senior
shit (and these senior monsters
probably have senior monster shits
several times a day, given their massive
food intake) because the senior fat shits
can't get their hands round those
nightmarishly inflated arse cheeks
and then into the relevant crack. Maybe
Kathy couldn't get her stubby little fingers
round her corner either. Maybe that's
what started her scatting, sort of like
a call for someone else to help
wipe her dirty hole clean ?
Or maybe it was just a Goth 'go
fuck the rest of you' type thing.

All of which left me in a bit of a quandary:
how best to talk to her about it, given the
intimate delicacies involved. I knew it
was her handiwork – and hers alone –
because she performed exactly the
same manoeuvre when taking an
incidental piss at my house: she ran
upstairs for a quick – don't mind me –
visit to the loo, and then left one of

those oily little quiffs of glistening
ebony stuff for me to see. And
admire ? No. Or to feel a strange
affection for ?

We had a Russian in the office too, and
my brainwave was to blame it all on
poor old Vladimir (not his real name), and
so to ask Kathy if she could keep an eye
out for signs of 'lavatorial indolence', so
that working together, faux conspiratorially –
and in which I was also according her a kind of
staff seniority –we could perhaps put an
end to this profoundly anxiety-inducing
Russian /Slavic/Muscovite behaviour.

But when I confided to her – in a
lowered voice – the situation at hand,
Kathy put on her 'nothing to do with
me, who cares, so I'm not really
listening' expression, which
she regularly employed whenever
anyone tried to explain anything
to her; she would tilt her head
to acknowledge she was
being spoken to, while also making
it clear that she was thinking about
something altogether more interesting,
and that, in a way, you were
really just being very boring.

She got fired for incompetence a
few months later, so I never did

resolve all that stuff about
her morbid messaging.
I should mention I once
took a piss in a flat in Athens
belonging to some hooker girlfriends
of mine, and their bowl was similarly
speckled with these little
Kathy black splats. It wasn't
their place of work, so they
wouldn't have been able to blame it on
their clients. I really ought to have
asked them what it all meant –
those tough ladies would surely
have set me straight.

By the way, the urban foxes here
in London – if you leave anything
out for them to eat overnight–
will gobble up the scraps and then
squirt a messy wet squirty shit right
there on the plate they've just eaten off.
Is it territorial? Or are they just saying
'thank you my darling sweetie pie'
the only way they know how ?

CBF Solie

Our neighbour's mother – called Pat –
– a divorcee – lived 'on her own'
with her two boys. Divorced mothers
living with their offspring was not that
unusual. And these two boys were
odd kids, one very rough and big
and cruel, the other weak and soft
and a cry-baby; and until I went to
school and met other kids my age, I
remember them as my only friends.
I was much closer in nature to the
cry-baby than to the thug, and the
two of us played together
most of the time.

Outings - say to the park - often involved
the cry-baby and me, with
an accompanying adult.

Pat was youngish – she looked young,
relative to the other adults I had around –
and she must have felt herself
going horribly to waste.

For some reason we often went boating.
Boating was fun, and maybe slightly dangerous
– stupid kids with paddles in a canoe
on their own (!) in a fast-flowing river–
but more problematically, it also cost money.
My parents didn't like me to do anything

which cost money. They thought ‘free’
was best. But I remember going boating,
quite often, seemingly ‘by chance’.

In fact, Pat was trying her luck with a
fancy man who supposedly owned
the canoes, as well as the only speedboat
at the marina. I was too young to know
what Pat was doing with this guy who,
as I remember it, was quite handsome
in a boring manly way, with sideburns and
a paedophile pencil moustache, and always
in a captain’s peaked cap with a golden anchor
badge. To me, their slightly awkward
banter was just adults talking to one another
in a friendly way. But – in retrospect –
it was obviously why we just always seemed
to ‘happen’ to be at the marina.

Somewhere, out of nowhere, we
three boys had a mantra-slogan
which we just couldn’t leave alone.
And it was ‘Captain Bang Funnyman !’
We intoned it with a slight pause
after the ‘Captain Bang’ and before
a heavy emphasis on ‘Funnyman!’,
as if ‘Funnyman!’ were a punchline.
And we used to shout this out
meaninglessly and randomly and
at the top of our voices, not directed
at anyone in particular, but rather
for the pleasure of just being able
to shout it out, and shout it again,

and again. It always seemed just
about to mean something,
maybe something important, though
never quite getting there. I can
no longer remember what it meant,
though careful reflection makes me think
it probably came from a line, most likely
misheard, from a Christmas panto.
Maybe. Maybe.
I don't know.

Then somehow – it must have been the
connection between that of a sea captain
with that of a speedboat – we began shouting
'Captain Bang Funnyman !' as soon as we
arrived at the marina, and we kept it up,
on and off, for quite a while, and for what
must have been an irritatingly
long time.

Pat sent a message to me, via her two boys,
to 'stop shouting Captain Bang
Funnyman' at the speedboat driver.
Apparently he didn't like it. And oddly,
this handed down to me instruction came as
something of a shock to my six-year-old self;
I felt isolated, and very alone. It can't have
been the first time I felt the cold water
of public disapproval – coming from
well outside of my family – but
it must have been
right up there.

Sometime around that time
- maybe a year or two later -
Pat showed me her tits and her bush,
pretending that her not having any
clothes on as I walked into her bedroom
was an accident. But she didn't
turn away, or try the least to
cover herself up, and I could read
the 'this is what a naked woman
looks like' expression on her face. She
wasn't embarrassed, or startled,
or afraid. So there you go. I can
see now that Pat must surely
have been in quite a bit
of a mess.

Piano Flesh

Life in a halfway house. Yes,
truly. But sometimes not as bad
as you might think,
at other times,
worse.

In Streatham, down a road
at the back of the rail
station.

I was there for 6 months; 7 or 8 at
the most. I think - as I remember.
I wasn't an ex-prisoner, or a loon,
but I was certainly badly down
on my luck. And the landlady didn't
want to let me through the
front door.

The place was full, 35 rooms, maybe,
Maybe one or two vacant for a day
before quickly being filled again,
yet you hardly ever saw anyone else.
The place was deathly quiet; quietly
deadly empty. An elderly lesbian
who dressed in overalls and a fedora
and always spoke like an aggressive
man – perhaps the only woman
in the building; you could hear her
clomping down the stairs, uttering

threats like ‘I’ll break their fucking legs’
and ‘I’ll tell that to his fucking face.’
And in the room right next to mine
an Irishman asked me if he
could borrow £25 ‘until tomorrow’,
even though he was actually on
his way out and leaving for good
at that very moment. The police
came looking for him
a few days later.

It was a weird place. It really was.
Most of the time – day and
night, it seemed completely deserted, even
abandoned, as if everyone had run away.
Maybe everyone other than me
had jobs to go to. So it was
unusual ever to hear voices.
And I don’t think anyone owned
a television, or a radio.
You never heard music.

Then one evening, as I was
coming back from the kebab shop,
there was a little balding unshaven
guy with bright red bloodshot eyes
standing at the bottom of the staircase
which led up to my room. And before
I could say anything, he stepped forward
and grasped my right hand:
‘Good evening. I’m David Michael Cook.
And I’ve spent the last 20 years of my
life as a patient in a mental hospital.’

‘Hello,’ I answered, ‘I’m Jakob Zaaiman.’
I left out my middle name ‘Hendrik’, or
‘Henk’, as it often seemed to cause an
unnecessary kink in any conversational flow.
‘Dutch, I presume?’ he asked. I nodded.
‘I knew some very pleasant Dutch girls, once,’
he said. ‘In Amsterdam. But I’ve been
unable to form any close relationships
since. I try to be pleasant to our
landlady, but it’s not possible for me
to form any kind of relationship with her.’
David stank of cigarette smoke, and
his fingers and beard were stained
a luminous brown.

The point of all this is that, along
the way, most of the people I meet
are David Michael Cook, and I become
their one and only friend for life. It’s
because I don’t mind talking to
people who’ve lost their minds, even
if they tell me the same damn thing
over and over again. I used to hate
being befriended by the insane, but
after a while I realised there were
just about the only friends I had.
So I gave in to the fact that David
and I were going to settle into
an uneventful companionship
for life. I felt, at our first
meeting, that I’d always known
him, and that he had always been
around. Good old Dave. But, oddly,

weirdly, I never saw him again, even
though I was in that desperate
dossing-house for another six
months. Nor could I quite
remember which room he said
he was in; there were so
rooms, all over the
place, all looking the same,
and all spread out on
so many floors.

Interalter

Apparently the Germans will
laugh at anything. They
will laugh a lot at lots of things that
don't appear to be particularly funny to
the rest of us, unless, that is, we
non-Germans are missing something
quite important. Germans will laugh
at someone opening a fridge. Or at a dog
scratching itself. Or at the look of
a house. Or at a bag of shopping being
placed on a table. Perhaps it's
a German quirk, laughing at
the not very funny. I had a German guy
working for me, so I know all about
this not-funny-funny first hand. Maybe
they keep themselves happy
by laughing. Hard to know
what to make of it.
Hard to know.

Anyway, to shift the topic
ever so slightly sideways a tiny bit:
round about Christmastime every year —
that is, as spent by me in one particular
dosshouse I used to live in — not in Germany,
by the way, this was in England —
we used to have to watch the movie
'The Great Escape' every year on TV;
and often there were only
the 2 of us downstairs to watch

it in the cramped TV/sitting room:
myself and a peculiarly hard-to-fathom
Glaswegian who had been stuck
in this forsaken place for at least
5 years longer than had I.
And at Christmas, when everyone
else had gone away to their families,
or to their friends, or to somewhere
else they could go to; there we
were. But I didn't mind being
left behind, as it were, to watch
'The Great Escape' on Christmas TV
with the weirdo Scotsman. And
of course 'The Great Escape' is one of
those films you can watch again and again
'forever and ever amen sweet Baby Jesus',
without having to think about anything or
anybody or anywhere, which is why they
kept showing it to us again and
again every year. The Scotsman and I
were probably watching it alone together
for maybe the seventh or eighth time,
who knows. But that's okay; I could
cope; I honestly didn't mind.
I'd watch it again this year
if I were still there.

And at some point in the action
the actor Steve McQueen
— having escaped by tunnel
from the German prison camp —
manages to grab hold of a Nazi motorbike
and, revving the engine up determinedly,

and because the Nazi soldiers are closing in,
finds himself forced to jump a stockade-type
fence to escape from the scene and then
somehow fly over the hills to safety.
And just as McQueen flew with a roar
over the stockade the Scotsman jumped
up off his seat and shrieked excitedly
at the screen: 'Go, man, go! Go, man, let's go!'
Yes, I thought. Yes. Perfect. Let's go, man!
I wanted to shout it out too.
Although of course, I felt very silly
for even thinking the words. So I turned and
asked my dear Christmas-deranged
Jock the Jock 'Do you seriously think
he's somehow going to get away
from the Nazis this year?'
Of course he was too excited
with McQueen and the roaring motorbike
to be bothered with me and my stupid
question. And of course I did have to wonder
if McQueen might just manage it this time.
Why ever not, could happen, surely?
Maybe next Christmas. Or the one
after that. Maybe even this
coming Christmas.

Find me, five wheel

Every Saturday we
took the train via Wimbledon
and Sutton to the Chinese School
in Belmont, and every
Saturday on an otherwise empty
Wimbledon station platform
there was usually only one other
person there regularly, a fat grubby
balding old guy wearing thick black
oily bookworm specs and a
stained and greasy brown overcoat.
He always carried a broken plastic
briefcase under his arm. He seemed
slightly overwhelmed by life, in that
specifically bewildered old man
kind of a way.

He must have been in his late
sixties, maybe mid-seventies
(I'm not great at guessing ages)
and he looked tired and misshapen,
and walked with a limp, and
seeing him there week
after week I thought I might
strike up a conversation, just
to know who he was and where
he was going. I thought of
him as one of those old-style
bookdealers – a bookman, if you like –
not someone who owned a shop,

but rather someone who
spent their lives rummaging around
yard sales and junk shops and
street stalls, searching
for anything that could quickly
be passed on at a modest profit.

His name was Graham, I think,
as I remember, I should have
written his name down, I don't like
getting people's names wrong,
it's awkward and unsettling; plus
I don't think I ever did find out
what his work was, though
it turned out that he spent
Saturdays going to an adult
education institute where, free
of charge, he could learn something
that interested him. And it also turned
out that Graham, with his grubby
coat and stubby fingers and filthy
specs was studying the piano, and
had reached a level where he could
try out some very simple
pieces by Shostakovich. News
to me that Shostakovich wrote
simple pieces that could be
played by guys like Graham, but
I suspect my reaction was tainted
by simple jealousy. I think I wanted
Graham to be just another waste
of space, and just another
derelict nobody getting in

everybody's way.

He took some dog-eared
sheet music out of the battered
briefcase, and I could straightaway
see that his piece wasn't that
dense with notes, so it
probably wouldn't have been
that difficult to get your head
and fingers around, and then
– maybe slowly, carefully,
deliberately– play the damn thing,
all the while trying to think a
few bars ahead. It would surely
have sounded jerky and slow
and awkward, but even
that would have been
a lot better than nothing.
Dmitri would surely have said
it was just what he
had in mind.

Graham pointed out
some bars marked in pencil
that his tutor had said to
concentrate on, and which
Graham might otherwise easily
get wrong if he didn't pay
close attention to them.
Graham said he often made
mistakes with the sharps
and flats, which weren't
marked next to the notes

themselves but which
you had to try to remember
were always sitting up there
next to the clef.

Angela d'Klaire

I remember this guy once telling us –
very casually—about the brutality that
went with being a conscript in the
Yugoslav army; like taking part in
gang rapes and murder, and torturing
people to death; maybe smashing
their faces in with clubs and rifle butts,
so sadistic violence everywhere
all the time and the daily norm;
basically he was letting me know
he didn't need lessons in life,
and that just maybe, call it
probably definitely
maybe, I did.

Sure he was kind of right. Because
you have to respect savagery, and
systematic cruelty, before you
then have to leave it alone,
even if you don't want to.
And who wants to, once a kind
of elemental fascination has
set itself in.

I had seen a typed notice on a college
pin board announcing that the school
was offering lessons in 'Macedonian' (!)
'for the first time ever', and not knowing
that there was even such a language,

thought I might wander along to a class
to see what it was all about.

Teacher turned out to be a ruggedly
handsome guy from somewhere near
Ohrid, (where's that, for godsake?) and
the class—a group of maybe six other
students (on a good day), all of us
huddled together in a cramped little
cell I didn't even know existed right
up under the roof in the loft in the
old school building. And the first class
was at 8 in the morning, so I had to
get up very early to be there
on time.

Teacher was called Lazar—we called
him the 'laser dot'—and I think (know)
all the women fell for him right at the off.
It kind of went without saying; a ruggedly
handsome film star type, upright,
well-dressed, with a handshake that
could break your fucking arm, and with
more than an added whiff of wild animal
about him. You can't go wrong with a
resumé like that, and he didn't. I overheard
one of the admin ladies admitting that
Lazar had 'fucked his way through all of us',
and I wondered what it would be like to be
such a man, able to fuck your way at
will through a roomful of (amongst others)
admin women of all physical types
and shapes and ages.

I got invited to go to the pub with Lazar and some of his other students. To my surprise Laser's student girls weren't all that friendly; they seemed a bit contemptuous of me. Fair enough. Obviously the Dot was able to drink the whole pack of us into stupefaction, while still able to talk more or less normally, and the only sign of alcoholic impairment came when he tried to pick up something he'd dropped on the floor, and I noticed he stayed bent over double for an unnaturally long time, staring uncomprehendingly at the filthy pub carpet. Later he confidently put his arm around one of the girl students—I've forgotten her name; it'll come to me, but I remember her face—and she looked well pleased, a mixture of pride and satisfaction at the effect of her allure, with the added pleasure of having the rest of us see it in play. Later still, pretending that they couldn't be seen but knowing full they well could, they French kissed sloppily, as if to tell the rest of us 'Yeah; there's going to be good fucking tonight.' So get used to it, I said to myself; get used to it.

Then this girl (Rachel?) went missing. She didn't turn up to classes, and she wasn't in the common room. I was told she had had a nervous breakdown and couldn't sit her exams. Honestly, did she really think that this selfish Yugoslav psycho-fucker

maybe loved her deep down, and was going
to be her dependable 'beau'? Please.

I met Lazar again socially at a drinks meeting
after a lecture on 'the Balkan situation', and he
was talking to an unkempt middle-aged PhD
woman (on the teaching staff) well known for
her alcoholism and her unsightly behaviour,
and for the fact that, as the day or the
evening wore on, PhD would become
ever more unruly, and sweary, and
wobbly on her feet, all the time trying
to pretend to be present and
decorous, and not the least horribly
shitface drunk.

And then Lazar 'escorted' this distressed
and dilapidated and dishevelled woman
'home'; I saw them leave early—she
had become spastic with the effort to
appear sober; slurring and flailing and
staggering about—and I saw them get
into the lift alone together.

Less than a week later I was told that
the wobbly woman had died of a
massive stroke and a brain seizure.
I straight away wondered if our
cock-wielding Mr Dot had killed/
murdered the stupid drunk— why not,
after all—maybe she was so fucked
when he fucked her pickled and
convulsing body that something

went wrong in their drunken death
fuck. Things can go wrong, you know,
in a bad fuck, and that's the truth.
Maybe he shook her scrawny neck
the same way he used to break our
fucking fingers. And if and when,
as a tough Yugoslav army shithead
rapist murderer stud, you'll fuck
anything with a cunt that moves,
you will, in time, get to work your
way through a roomful of secretaries
and admin ladies (of all shapes and
sizes and ages and cunts) as did
our Macedonian guy.

May Westerlee

Maybe it runs in the family, so
something for me to look
forward to, if this is
about blood.

One of my many aunts, again, living
somewhere up north – Stafford, or
thereabouts – went wrong in the head –
perhaps a stroke, or a blood clot, or
a seizure, or early onset dementia,
I don't know; details were not
discussed in front of me, so there
was no talk of hospitalisation
or incarceration; at least,
as I say, not in front of me.

Now this aunt was well-known for sending
Books to people, as sort of unexpected presents,
or because she thought you ought to read them,
none of them ever accompanied by a note of
explanation, though you knew it was from her by
the handwriting on the address label, and
because no one else ever sent books
like that through the post to
anyone we knew.

When I was five she sent me a Tintin book; Tintin
had only just been translated into English, and
although I was too young to read the text I could
easily supply my own ideas as to what I thought

was going on, and this didn't spoil the forward
march of the pictures in the least. And in
an odd way her sending me that Tintin turned
out to be one of the bestest moments of my
altogether shit early life. I never got to ask
her why she had chosen Tintin for me,
and she probably wouldn't have
known herself, or even have
remembered doing so.
'What's Tintin?' she
would have asked.

And there is something about a book arriving
in the post without explanation which gave the
event a weird urgency, a strange immediacy, as if
you needed to get on with reading it right away,
and forget about everything else, almost as if
the text contained vital information, and
you could worry about saying 'thank you'
–or similar– later when the whole thing
was over, and behind you, and you
had been saved from an
unseen unknown (?).

Then something went wrong
- in her head - a second time,
this time even more wrongly, so a
stronger crank of the dial. Gone
were the unexpected books, and now
it was newspapers and magazines, rolled
into cardboard tubes, with various articles
inside them heavily bordered in ballpoint pen,
all headed by a date also in ballpoint pen,

emphasising the timely importance of
'right away now this very minute'.

Then it became wads of articles on their own,
roughly cut and torn out of newspapers, all still
bordered in biro, though some of those
biro borders now lost in the rough cuttings
and tearings-out. The wads would be
stuffed into big brown envelopes, before
being securely double-sealed with Sellotape,
then studded with colourful postage stamps.
Different articles for different people, but no
clear logic behind the choices: why prison
conditions for my sister, or a
mining disaster for me ? Why food
shortages in Mexico for my brother,
or missionary work in the Pacific
for my mother ? Yet we didn't
throw this stuff away, some of us –
probably mainly me - read
our articles and studied the
pictures, and wondered what any
of it had to do with anything. Maybe
that understanding is still ahead
of me, so that as I age I get
to see what she was up to,
who knows. But in a
quiet way it doesn't
seem much to matter
anymore, now.

Zoona Sticky

I like to believe I'm alert to
sarcasm, but sometimes people
say things that pass me by. I remember
a lawyer/avant garde (read that
as 'stroke') musician being
asked in an interview what he would
like to see more of in an extremely
well-known worldwide magazine and
he answered 'Photos of heads
on sticks!'. It was a good couple
of years before I realised
he was joking.

And the truth is
if I don't clean the bath every
few days with Vim, or with a Vim-like
scouring substance, big brown patches
start to appear around and about
the sides of the bath, including at the back
and under the taps, and then
the whole tub starts
to look exactly like
a dead cow.

This happens even if I'm not
washing anything at all
in the bloody 'thing'. This happens
even if I don't go near the
damn beast for the
least reason.

Again:

So if you don't clean your bath every
few days with Vim, or with a Vim-like
scouring substance, big brown patches
will start to appear around and about
the sides, including at the back and
under the taps, and your bath
will begin to resemble a
dead cow. So it will look exactly
like you have a great big dead cow
lying totally dead down on
the floor in your
bathroom.

Sooner or later, I believe I will
one day - maybe by accident,
maybe by design, maybe by
divine intervention - write a concise,
pithy sketch – in a tumble of words – that
people all around the world everywhere
will very much enjoy. And take to their
hearts! And then some of my
small circle of fans will recite what bits
they can remember of what I've
written – snatches and
half-forgotten and obscure phrases –
at their funerals, and weddings
and during their beautiful drunken
orgy-banquets. They will shout out
things like 'Your bathroom looks
like a fukken dead cow, fukken

just lying there, right
fukken dead.’

Jesus in a toast

He said he was coming to London for 'about a week', but let's call it 5 or 6 days. He is on his way to Paris, but a stop-off in London is important to him, as he had never been here/there before.

He tells me he is coming on Monday, but will probably have to leave early on Friday. I work that out at roughly 3 days, not nearly 5.

So he arrives late Monday evening, and says that early Tuesday he will need to go to a travel agent and get some documents for cheap train fares in Europe. He stresses he will get it all out of the way 'first thing', then we can meet up and plan how best to spend the rest of his time. But the travelling to get here has worn him out and he is struggling to stay awake, with his eyes starting to close if I begin anything involving more demanding than the emptiest of small talk. He also has some calls to make back at his hotel.

He gets up late Tuesday morning, and only reaches the agent he has chosen –

or was told to contact – around noon.
The girl he especially needs to see is out
of the office. He waits. She returns,
but it takes some time to sort out
the exact documents and tickets
he needs. Key bits will still have to
arrive from elsewhere by courier
the following morning. Then
he asks her casually for 'advice' on
what to do and see in London, and
they discuss things until mid-afternoon,
when he suddenly remembers he
has forgotten to eat, and so leaves
to go to a nearby McDonalds.
He calls me around 5, and we meet at 7,
and then spend a few hours together
in a pub, trying to decide where
we should go. The beers soon sap
his energy, so he is happy to spend
the evening just catching up with me.
We go our separate ways a few
hours later at closing time.

Next day he gets up late, and goes
back to the travel agent. They go
through the documents and get them
properly filled out and stamped with
photo IDs. It's well after lunch by then
and, well pleased with all the sortings-out
of his important paperwork, he gets
talking to the girl again about this and
that. Eventually he gets round to asking
her if she has a boyfriend, but when he

tells me about this later I can sense that
it's a bad wrong turning. She hesitated,
not really answering directly, and in
effect saying 'no', as well as implying
'I don't think I would want him to be
you'. And by now it's late afternoon.
We meet up and 'decide' to eat
in a nondescript Italian off
Shaftesbury Avenue, before then
moving back to the exact same
pub we were in the night before.
He is tired and drained from all
this nothingness, and would rather
just cut things short and get
back to bed.

He gets up late again the following
morning and decides he might just
quickly go back to the travel agent.
He said he couldn't quite remember the
name of a place his girl had recommended.
But she isn't there when he arrives,
so he is again made to wait. He seems
to want to push his luck one last time.
But everyone knows he will be gone
the following morning, never to be
seen again. And in effect he had spent
all 3 days of his 3 days in London with
a travel agent discussing what he
might do with his 3 days in London.

We meet up again mid-afternoon,
and wander disinterestedly around the

backstreets near Soho Square, visiting an old church, and then, for an hour or two, gazing in at the windows of some of the specialist shops dotted thereabouts. Of course he has to be up at 4.30am next day – for the flight from Gatwick – so it makes sense, he says, to have a properly early night. He tells me he's sure he can get a sandwich to eat back at his hotel, so we skip going along to another Italian.

Now even if my friend were to read this, he wouldn't recognise himself in my portrayal of him; and even if he did he wouldn't know what the problem was supposed to be.

Klim Tone

It's a big city – massive – yet
when we were discussing
terrible places to live, and where
people might go to disappear
and die, I mentioned my fear of
ending up at King's Mansions - off
the Caledonian Road - and she said
'I used to live there. It's a
great place. I loved it.'

Marianne worked as a stripper,
though she introduced herself to
us as an 'exotic dancer', which I
thought was kinda charming, as it
made her seem something of a
professional, as well as artistically
sensitive, and all this right up to the
moment she thought that we
weren't taking her seriously,
and the smile hardened and turned
momentarily vicious. It wouldn't be
right to call that smile a snarl, because
in her sudden hardening we're still
looking at someone trying to be
'nice', but you knew the mood
had changed.

She was an attractive woman, dressed
that night all in white (!), almost a wedding
dress, okay maybe a key bridesmaid; and

she had height, and a figure, hair, a good
complexion, a great smile, everything
you could possibly need for putting
yourself about; she could easily
have been a professional model of
sorts. Yet when she talked to you
you soon realised that if you even
distantly hinted at something she
didn't like, you could expect to
be put in your place, with
firmly added venom.

She said she'd only been working
as an 'exotic dancer' for a 'short
time', making it seem as well, I
thought, like something a student
would do between proper jobs.

Then Marianne told us various stories
about her workaday life in a wank parlour,
and these stories were designed to
make her seem very much in control
of the clientele, as well as very much
in control of events, but I took
the stories the wrong way. I knew
they were complete rubbish in
factual terms, but I misguidedly
thought them sordid and demeaning,
until it dawned on me that she likely
really enjoyed flashing her twat at
men and having them wank
themselves off in front of her.

(And did she give a hand as well,
you know, for extras? It would
have made sense, both financially
and geographically.)

Problem was, Marianne didn't have any
friends – not really - and her boyfriend –
Diego, or some such, from Brazil –
was selfish and thoughtless and
inconsiderate and cheated on her,
and basically could care less about
anything that wasn't instant fun in
the right here and now.

So were they real tears, or just Marianne
acting out the moment? She must have
been a good actress – of a sort, you know
what I mean - having tested
all sorts of cosplayings and playthings –
schoolgirl, nurse, business executive,
police officer - in the private booths
of her wank shop. But then why
don't you ditch 'Diego' and try to
get yourself a better boyfriend?
'He's got a big dick,' Marianne said,
as the only thing she could think of
in his favour. A gay male 'friend' of hers
heard that remark and, shaking
his head, whispered to me
'Marianne's just a nothing
dumb blonde.' I'm still
thinking that one over. Okay
I'd love Marianne dressed as

a nun to show me her holy
holly bush, but sorry
I'm not going to pay
good money for
that.

Sarken

Once, when I was a teenager,
and on the run, and
seriously sleep-deprived, anxious,
and exhausted, riding a train
at 3 in the morning, pitch black
outside and not being exactly
sure of my route, or of having
caught the right train, and
looking out of the carriage window
for signs of reassurance, yet
unable to read the platform signboards
at speed in the dark,
and not wanting to ask anyone
where I was in case I
made a right fool of myself;
and then eventually seeing familiar
towers and tall buildings
which I knew to be London, but
in my tired and hyper-surreal state
couldn't be sure, and worse still
familiar towers and tall buildings
known to everyone suddenly
looked horribly unfamiliar, and I
thought that perhaps other cities like
Birmingham or Glasgow or Brussels
or Berlin maybe had exactly the
same-looking buildings, and that
I could honestly be anywhere
on earth. For a brief moment I
thought Jesus maybe I'd

ended up In Poland.

That sense of dread at the
wholly familiar becoming
unaccountably and unsettlingly
uncertain has stayed
with me all my life,
popping up now and
then at moments of
vulnerability just when
things couldn't seem to
get any worse.

Spiders a year!

I always think of her
as (the) (an) unborn.
Who knew. (?)

Because the truth is, if you
want things to work out
for you in New York, then
you need to choose your
bitch bastard truthful face
and then just (fucking) stick
with it; and stick with
it, bigtime, (got it?).

Huh, what? What is
this!

New York! New York.

There's street life, with all
kinds of people standing about
in the sunshine on the front
steps of the brownstones; chatting,
and watching people go by; all
these lots of people waiting for
something (or for nothing) to
happen; then to add to this
everyday mix the (true) story of
a young woman who worked
in weird high-fashion photography
and who liked to dress up

every other day in a completely
new look, and then behave and
speak and act very differently
depending on what she had
chosen to dress up as.

We could (just about) tell
it was her, even if it took
us a moment or two in
the street - or in the lobby
- to come to and realise that
she had put on yet another
new body again. But the
problem was that the geisha
might not be the bobby soxer
or the bondage queen or the
motorcycle gimp, or the anal
fister or maybe not anyone
of them at all.

Then someone (not me)
said to her, 'We know who
you are (babe) but we
don't know which one
it's supposed to be. You
really got to stop
fucking with us.'

Sure, sure. Okay. Stop
it. Right now. (For your
own sake.) Stop doing
this. Stop changing your
face.

But that was a lifetime
ago! Because ‘princess’
is now rich and famous the
world over if you know about
certain brands of transgressive
BDSM haute couture photoshoots
lining the coveted walls of some
of those specialist ultra weird
modern art galleries.
Who’da thunk any of it?
Who, indeed.
Maybe the cosplayer
bunny herself, I guess -
if you say so - and
I think I do.

Vernon a Murder Car

Poems about birds and
nature and sweet sunsets
and the loveliness of love
are always so feeble and
irritating and silly and,
when the sun itself has
sunset — as it invariably
does — about absolutely
nothing worth giving a
second thought to
at all.

So the following poem, then,
is not going to be about birds,
mice, geese, pigeons, etc. It's
going to be about something
quite other.

Now the undeniable truth
is that if a bird plops on you,
then you are a shit person. More
specifically, you have been cosmically
identified as a 'shithead'. A pigeon once
shat a squirt of predictably white shit
on my dad's black homburg hat — and
while he was wearing the bloody thing! —
which meant that the universe was telling
the rest of us — his family and friends
and colleagues — that my dad was
in all honesty not much more than a

splat of shit on a hat. (As if we
didn't know that much already.)
But in a quaint way, we had now
been given a convincing
second opinion.

And I once spent a whole day
wandering about London with an
Italian girl, and towards the end of
our time together, a passing seagull
shat mightily on her arm. She said
to me 'Look at this!' pointing to
the shat splat on her expensive
Italian jacket. And I thought 'this girl
is likely bad news.' Which is
exactly what she turned out to
be. So that goddammed bombing
bird helped me dodge at least a
couple of bad shit bullets,
the way I see it.

Now at the back of my house
there is a little patch of lawn
nestling nicely under the weeping
fronds of a huge and bright yellow
Robinia tree. I quite often sit on
the grass there alongside my
many cats, especially in summer.
Pigeons and parakeets perch patiently
for hours high up in on the Robinia
branches, and of course they can't
help but unload themselves every now
and so often. I've been shat on at least

three times. Make of that what you
will: I've already made my shit peace
pact with the Almighty king of these
'oracular aerial defecators'. Now there's
some neat and sweet poeticity for you,
Geoffrey Hill!

'Watch out for anuses at 12 o'clock!'
I tell visitors when I take them out
into the garden. So far so good.
Yet the only person who has taken
a direct hit so far is me. As well
as one of my cats. A neighbour
once sat in a random splat on the
garden bench, but that may not
count, karmically, as far as I know,
that is to say, right now, and
as of today; so while I mull that
one over, godbless you all as
you look up to the heavens
for guidance.

(Regards to 'Supervisor Jim Lahey'
of Sunnyvale Trailer Park in
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.)

Brick fry

A vegetarian once told me
that ‘paradoxes’ – those weird
mixtures in life of the positive
with the negative - should
‘be celebrated’; but how
exactly do you do that?
I think we need to know,
and I ought to have asked
him, but my veggie’s flown
the coop – gone,
disappeared - so
we never will.

So there’s this bird which
hops from one wooden
perch to another, then
on to the cage floor,
then back to one of the
perches. It does this all
day, every day, for the
rest of its life. Something
it thinks is the only thing
available for it to do. And
in truth it is the only thing
available for it to do, in the
living out - after a fashion, if
you will - of its godforsaken
fucking cage life. And this
little hop hop hopping
birdie (!) bye bye belonged

to the aforementioned
vegetarian who told
me that, even if he ate
some meat even by mistake,
he wouldn't be able to
keep it down. 'I wouldn't
be able to hold it down.'
Sweet, yes, sure. He'd
sick it all back up, in
holy virtuosity. So
now you know. Truth
was, I watched the
bird; and I'd listened to
the vegetarian screed; but
said and did nothing. What
was there to say. And what
was there to do, other
than write about it, now,
some 20 years later.

He didn't really like
animals; he didn't (even)
know they were there.
He couldn't see the
fucking hop hop hopping
bird hopping away
next to him. Neither
could I, in a way. You
could say that – for all
these years – I've been
holding that down; and
am only now trying to
sick it all back up, in

an act of sacred (paradoxical?)
goodly godly celebratory
virtue holiness.

Beanut Iron

You can't really be young
when you're old; it feels
wrong; I don't think it works.
It feels 'awkward', not
quite right. ('Why'?)

Dr Scott – a little grey-haired old
lady retired-general-practitioner - was
– to say the least – in her early eighties
when I first met her; and she was
going (had gone) very deaf. Another
doctor – in San Francisco, where we
were staying - prescribed for her hearing
loss a large set of chunky metal
headphones – those old-style tin
cans – connected by a length of wire
to a hand-held mike, which Dr Scott
held up and pointed towards you,
as if she were recording you
professionally for some
unknown vox pop archive.

Now 'Scottie' (we never called her
that (!); she was always 'Dr Scott') loved
the opera, and believed that she still
knew all the old showstoppers, and
at a certain cue – perhaps misheard
noises on the television or radio - might
there and then suddenly burst into song,
but – jesus - being horribly ear deaf as

well as horribly tone deaf, she just
wailed idiotically in a high-pitched and
tuneless falsetto screaming, a very
stupid noise, almost as if making
silly fun of the idea of singing itself;
as well as pissing mightily
all over any music.

But that's not it.

Because what I want to get at
here is that the little old grey-haired
going, going, gone badly deaf Dr Scott
seemed very young for however old
she was, and she spoke almost like a
teenager, full of enthusiasms for the
new things she'd discovered, as if
her life were still to be lived all up
ahead of her, and not an ethereal
'something' to be reflected upon
as it slid away into an increasingly
distant past.

And many years later, back in
England, and heading for a spell
in Scotland, I suddenly wondered
if it might be possible to camp for
a spell at Dr Scott's house; 'camp'
meaning 'stay for some weeks' while
I sorted out something less transient,
and less adolescent. But Dr Scott
had already been dead for at least
10 years by then, only I didn't know

that, because it hadn't occurred to me that a ninety-year-old schoolgirl couldn't/wouldn't live forever.

A seventy-year-old woman friend of mine – thin and unattractively dried out and a bit frail and elderly-looking – told me that she had been 'seduced' – that is, 'had allowed herself to be well fucked' – by a twenty-year-old male student from Germany who was staying in her house as a lodger. 'Student' appeared to me to be a normal personable - even handsome - young guy. The two of them had been drinking together all day, and she is always super aggressive when drunk. Doesn't bear thinking about was the thought that came to mind. Okay I know he knows she's for the chop soon (she has an age-related terminal illness) and that this is a neat way to get his hands on her savings, but even so, even so. (I couldn't do it.)

700

I once took a photograph of a group of
toys – figurines, if you like – knick-knacks,
trinkets, trifles (!) - one of which was
a tiny porcelain pink mouse,
sitting on its backside like a cat,
with its shiny white tail curled around
to its front. The other figurines were
in sharp focus, but for some reason
not the little pink mouse.

'Pity that the pig is blurred' said a fellow
photographer friend, when I showed
him a printed copy of the scene. 'Yes
I've tried to solve that many times,'
I told him, 'but it's never worked. Then
I realised this was because the (pig)
mouse is actually blurred in
real life.'

'Funny you should say that,' he said.
'My wife is also blurred in real life too.
I can never photograph her properly.
I can't seem to get her face in focus.'
Then he added 'But I can often
get the back of her head right.
I can get the hair super sharp.'

Summonatin

'Degas was my favourite antisemite;
as were Pound and Eliot.' (!)
(R.B.Kitaj)

Her daughter was in Mongolia, in the
capital city Ulan Bator in the late 1990s,
and the daughter said the country was
awash with alcohol; daughter needed to
get to the bank, so she left her hotel at
about 8.30 in the morning and set
out on quite a walk, and walking
along a wide, empty boulevard
(this was before people had cars)
leading to the city centre, she saw a
single taxi drifting along at about
10 miles an hour, so she waved at
it but it just trundled slowly past her,
the driver staring blankly ahead, so
she jogged alongside the cab and
knocked on the side window but the
driver did nothing, so she opened the
back door and the driver stopped; she
got in and asked the driver to go to the
bank and he, saying nothing, and not
even turning to acknowledge her,
briefly revved the engine and then took
off at about 5 miles an hour. After about
200 metres of steady steering a front
wheel started rubbing and scraping
against the concrete kerb — squeaking

and squealing as it did so — and then after
about another 50 metres the wheel
seemed to be sticking to the kerbside,
and the cab itself slowed to a halt.
The driver then rested his head against
the steering wheel and, though his eyes
were still open, appeared to be
unconscious. Daughter got out and
walked the rest of the way into
the centre of the town and
then into the bank.

There was only one clerk/teller
at a long empty bank counter, and
there were no other customers or staff
to be seen, and the lone teller appeared
unable to speak, standing quite dumb and
still and holding the edge of the desk
in front of her with both hands, her
eyes glazed, her mouth tightly closed.
Then the teller, now staring fixedly at
the floor, eased herself slowly backwards
into a swivel chair and let her arms
drop stiffly to her sides. Daughter
waited there for a while, in case the
pickled creature came to, and was
perhaps able to talk, but she never
did, so the daughter gave up, and
went back outside and
into the street.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jakob Zaaiman is an artist and writer living in London. He writes prose fiction as well as poetry, and he likes to create works that defy easy explanation. He has also written extensively on modern contemporary art.

Other works:

GHOST QUEEN (Prose Short Stories)
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